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NOTES

(B)

ON THE

"FAIRE GRAMMAR SCHOOL"

IN

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

AND ITS MASTER

ELIJAH CORLETT.

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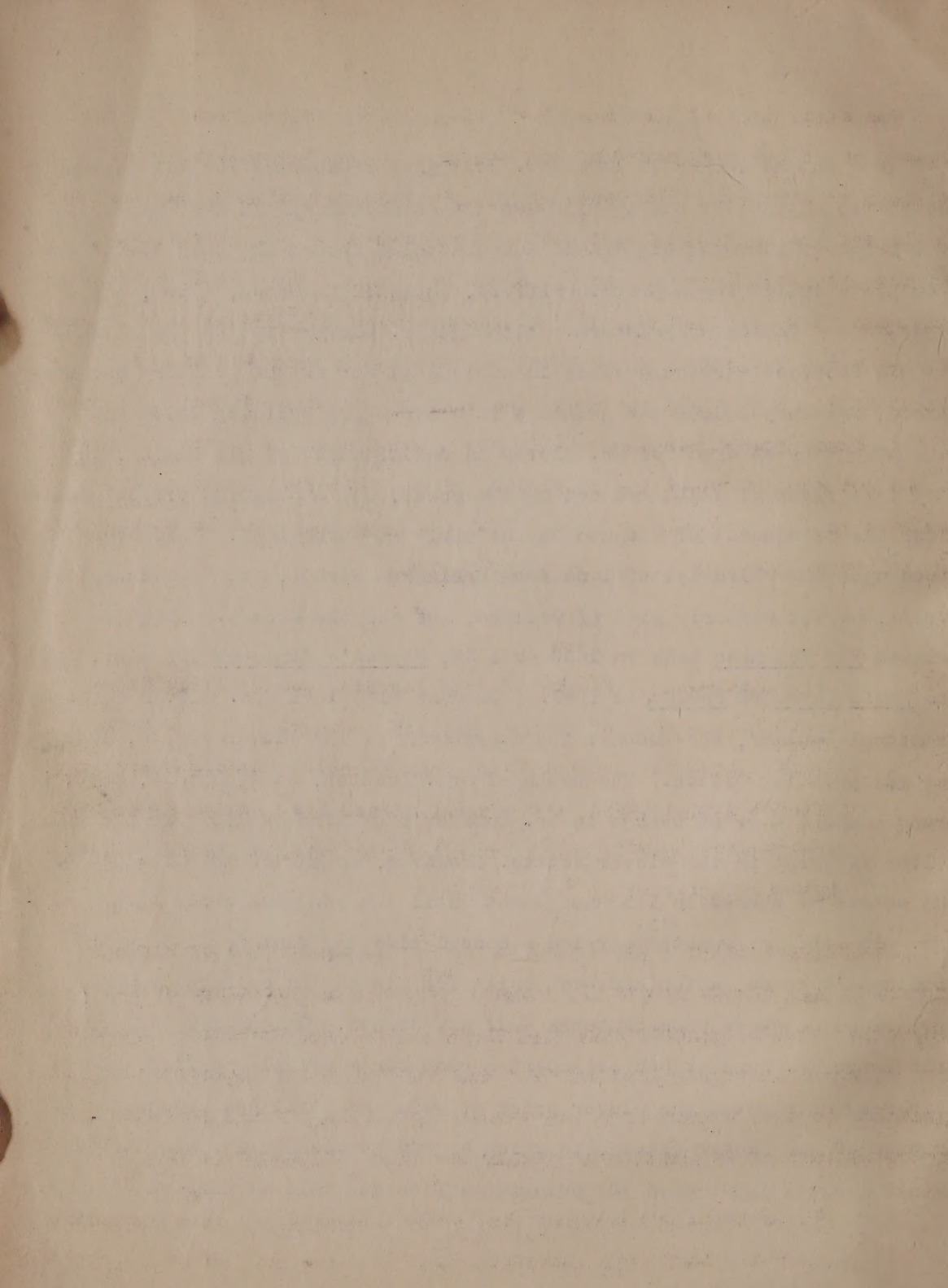
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When in the summer of 1638 Rev. Jose Glover embarked for New England one of the objects he had in mind was the establishment in the New World of a printery as among his "goods and chattels" aboard the ship "John" was a complete outfit for a printing office, including a press, types, and paper, and a family of printers. Although Mr. Glover died on the passage yet his foeffees carried out his intentions as far as the printery was concerned, for they housed the printers in a two-story building which had been bought by an agent of Mr. Glover in anticipation of his coming, on the first floor of which was set up the press, and a printing office opened under the management of Stephen Day as early as March 1639. This house stood upon the third lot of land from Braintree Street, now Massachusetts Avenue, on the westerly side of Crooked, now Holyoke Street. Here was printed The Freemans Oath in 1638 or 1639, Pierce's Almanack for 1639, and the Whole Booke of Psalms in 1640. On June 21<sup>st</sup> 1641 Mrs. Glover married President Dunster, who assumed the management of the Glover estate, including the printing office. The death of Mrs. Dunster, on August 23, 1643, brought about a great change in Mr. Dunster's affairs as his wife had only a life interest in the Glover estate. However, as one of the trustees of the estate he shared in its management until the youngest child became of age. In 1644 Mr. Dunster married a second time and went to live in the president's house, which had been built for him on the college grounds very close to where Massachusetts Hall now stands. On the first floor of this house Mr. Dunster had set apart a room for a printing office, and to this room he removed the Glover press of which he still had possession as trustee of the Glover estate, to which he had to account for profits in printing until 1655, when the printing office was sold to Harvard College.





The exact date of the removal of the printing office from "Mr. Dayes house", as it was designated by Mr. Dunster, to the "presidents house" has not been ascertained. The death of Mrs. Dunster necessitated the sale of the houses and lands held in trust by the feeffees of the Glover estate and the distribution of the estate among the heirs. This would naturally take some time, and the sale of "Mr. Dayes house" is presumed to have been made in 1646, the same year in which Matthew Day is supposed to have bought from Nathan Aldis the house and land on Braintree street. The sale of "Mr. Dayes house" would necessitate the removal of the press but probably it was not removed until the completion of the president's house, which was late in 1645 or early in 1646. That the house was sold is proven from the following entry in The Proprietors Records

"13 (1)  $\frac{1647}{1648}$

Mr. Henry Dunster Bought of John Fownell, one Dwelling house with about a rood of ground, Richard Champney North, William Towne, Nathaniel Hancock West, John Russell, Francis Moore, and Crooked street south, and Crooked street East, which sayd house John Fownell had formerly bought of the sayd Mr. Henry Dunster, but was neglected to bee entered."

In his lawsuit with the Glover heirs for an accounting of his management of the Glover estate Mr. Dunster presents an inventory of his receipts in which it appears that "Mr. Dayes house sold for thirty pounds".

On the eleventh of November 1647 the General Court passed the famous law which is the foundation of our school system, and which provided for the establishment of common and grammar schools. It reads in part,

"It is therefore ordered that every towneship in this jurisdiction, after the Lord hath increased them to the number of 50 householders,





shall then forthwith appoint one within their towne to teach all such children as shall resort to him to write and reade, whose wages shall be paid either by the parents or masters of such children, or by the inhabitants in general, by way of supply, as the major part of those that order the prudentials of the towne shall appoint; provided, those that send their children be not oppressed by paying much more than they can have them taught for in other townes; and it is further ordered, that where any towne shall increase to the number of 100 families or householders, they shall set up a grammer schoole, the master thereof being able to instruct youth so farr as they may be fited for the university, provided that if any towne neglect the performance hereof above one yeare, that every such towne shall pay 5<sup>l</sup> to the next schoole till they shall perform this order."

In accordance with this law the town of Cambridge passed the following vote,

"13<sup>th</sup> 9<sup>th</sup> Mo. 1648:

It was agreed at a meeting of the Whole Towne, that there should be land sould of the Comon for the gratifying of Mr. Corlet, for his paines in keeping a schoole in the Towne, the sume of Ten pounds, if it can be attained, provided: it shall not prejudice the Cow comon."

This is the first record that we have of the townsmen of Cambridge voting to appropriate money to pay for the support of the schools and Mr. Elijah Corlett is the first schoolmaster whose salary was partly paid from the town treasury. The schools authorized by the General Court were to be public schools, but not free schools, that is, all parents had the right and were expected to send their children to the schools but they were also





expected to pay a large portion of the expense of maintaining the schools. It was not until 1885 that the public schools of Massachusetts were absolutely free.

Mr. Corlett, however, had been teaching a grammar school in Cambridge for several years previous to 1648, but it was a private school, that is, Mr. Corlett could accept or reject pupils as he saw fit, managed his school according to his own ideas, and was paid for his services such sums as were agreed upon with the parents of the pupils.

Elijah Corlett was the son of Henry Corlett of London, and was born in 1610. He was educated at Lincoln College, Oxford, to which he was admitted 16th March 1628. He came to Cambridge as early as 1641 and was admitted freeman of the colony May 14, 1645. He was of the same age as Nathanael Eaton, and possibly may have come to Cambridge with him. Being amply qualified to teach it is possible that when Eaton left the college in September, 1619, Corlett may have been invited to assist in, if not to take the full charge of, the education of the students in the college, until the arrival of Mr. Dunster in 1640. Whether he was employed in the college or not, before 1642 he had acquired an excellent reputation as a teacher. In a letter "from your loving friends in Boston, New England" to several gentlemen in England, printed in London in 1643 in New England's First Fruits he is spoken of as follows:

"And by the side of the Colledge a faire Grammar Schoole, for the training up of young scholars and the fitting of them for Academical learning, that still as they are judged ripe, they may be received into the Colledge. Of this schoole Master Corlet is the Master who hath very well approved himself for his abilities dexterity and faithfulness in teaching and education of the youths under him."





As at the time this letter was written, September 26, 1672, it is doubtful if any of his pupils had passed from the grammar school to the college, it is probable that his reputation for excellence in teaching had been made in the college rather than in the grammar school. The wording of the above extract is indefinite.

Mr. Corlett married about 1643 Barbara Cutter, daughter of Mrs. Elizabeth Cutter, widow, and sister of William Cutter, a prominent citizen of Cambridge. William Cutter, born in Newcastle on the Tyne, arrived in Cambridge before 1637. About the same time arrived his brothers-in-law Edward Goffe and Thomas Sweetman. William Cutter was made freeman April 18 1637. In 1638 he occupied the estate on the south-west corner of Dunster and Winthrop streets, having as his next door neighbor on Dunster street Herbert Pelham, Esq. His father died in Newcastle on the Tyne in 1640 and his mother with a younger son Richard and a daughter Barbara came to Cambridge and presumably resided with William. After the marriage of Barbara with Mr. Corlett she went to live with Mr. Corlett, as in her will signed 16th February 1662 she bequeaths all her estate "to my very loving sonne Mr. Elijah Corlett and to my daughter Barbare his wife with whom I have now sojourned about twenty years". If Mr. Corlett had married in 1642, as would seem to be indicated by this extract, it is very probable that that was the year in which he opened his grammar school, and that that was the grammar school referred to in New England's First Fruits. Mr. Corlett resided on the east side of Dunster street between Mount Auburn and Winthrop streets and it is more than probable that in this house, from 1642 to 1648, was kept the "faire grammar schoole".

In 1647 there was a movement among some of the public spirited citizens for the erection of a building to be used for school purposes only, and acting as agent for these citizens Mr. Dunster purchased the "Daye house" which he had previously sold to John Pownell. The "Daye house" was to be removed and on the lot was to be erected a stone building, the agreement





for the building of which is still in existence, and which we quote as showing the style of the first grammar school building and also that the land must have been purchased early in 1647 although not recorded until 1648.

1. "Articles of agreement between Henry Dunster and Edward Goffe on the one party and Nicholas Withe and Richard Wilson, Daniel Hudson, masons, on the other party, witness as followith:

1. That we Nicolas Wite, Richard Wilson and Daniel Hudson, masons, have undertaken to get at Charlestown Rock one hundred and fifty load of rock stone, and to lay them in a convenient place whence they may be fetched with carts, and that betwene this present third month 1647 and the tenth of the ninth month next ensuing, for the which stones Henry Dunster and Edward Goffe covenant to pay to us sixe pence the load.

2. Item. That we the foresaid three masons will wall or lay the said stones in wall for twelve pence the yard, so long as we lay any side of the said wall within the ground, and the other answering walls at the same price until they come to the height of the wall that lieth within the ground, albeit that these walls should lie both sides of the ground to the open air, and that we will measure all this cellar or in ground wall within the house.

3. Item. That we will inwall the said stones above ground a foot and a half thick at the least, at the middle story, and so proportionally gathering in until it end in the wall plates or eaves, about a foot thick, for eighteen pence a yard, making in the said above ground walls, where Henry Dunster or Edward Goffe



shall appoint, convenient door ways, arched over head, and window spaces as we shall be ordered and directed for timber windows to be put in as we go up with the wall, one of which said door ways, and as many window spaces as shall be judged convenient, we will also make in the cellar wall as we shall be directed.

4. Item. That we will erect a chimney below, ten foot wide between the jambes, and another in the room above eight foot  $\frac{1}{2}$  wide within the jambes, in the place where we shall be directed, whereof if the jambes be different from the wall of the house we will receive eighteen pence a yard for as much as we wall with stone, and ten shillings a thousand for what square bricks we lay, and sixteen shillings a thousand for the bricks that appear out of the roof.

5. Item. The said Henry Dunster and Edward Goffe are to prepare and lay on the ground in reddiness, within forty or at the most fifty feet of the aforesaid cellar, all the aforesaid bricks and rock stones; but the said bricks, as many as shall need to be cut, are to be done by the said masons. The convenient planks also and poles for staging are to be laid in readiness be the said Henry and Edward and the stages to be made by the said masons.

6. Item. The two gable ends of the aforesaid walls or schoolhouse shall be wrought up in battlement fashion, at the price of eighteen pence a yard, as above said.

7. Item. The aforesaid masons by these presents covenant that they will lathe the roof of the aforesaid schoolhouse and tile the same at six shillings the thousand the tile.

8. Item. The said masons covenant to perfect the said work that is herein mentioned before the first of the sixth month that shall be in the yeare one thousand six hundred forty-eight,





provided the said Henry Dunster and Edward Goffe procure all the materials requisite of stones, brick, timber, clay, lime, sand, and the said materials lay in convenient place.

9. Item. It is the true intent and meaning of both parties that all pay specified in these writings should be such as is received of the inhabitants and neighbours of the town of Cambridge, provided it be good and merchantable in its kind, whether corn or cattle, and to go at such rates as now it is payable from man to man when the aforesaid masons take the aforesaid work, that is to say, Wheat at 4s, Rye at 3s 6d, Indian at 3s, Peas at 3s 6d Barley malt at 4s 6d the bushel.

In witness of the premises we for our parts subscribe  
our hands

Henrie Dunster

Edward Goffe.

Sealed, signed, indented and delivered in presence of

Richard Hildreth."

This agreement shows that Mr. Dunster and Mr. Goffe had been appointed a committee by the persons engaged in the enterprise, and had assumed the responsibility and the expense. It also shows that the land upon which they intended to erect the building must have been bought before May 1647 as it is not probable that they would have contracted for the delivery of stone if they had not land upon which to store it. This would seem to be very strong evidence that the "Daye house" must have been sold to John Fownell in 1646.

The following extracts from the Town Records show conclusively that the town did not assist in erecting the building, nor paid any of the ex-





penses of maintaining the school, excepting to pay a part of Mr. Corlett's salary, until 1656 when it bought the building.

10<sup>th</sup> 12 55  
mo

Also whereas Mr. Dunster hath made a proposiccion to the Townsmen for the acquitting and discharging of the said forty pounds so received as before promised [by the said Thomas Danforth] upon the account of his out laying for the school house. The townsmen do declare that as they cannot yeld to the same for the Reasons before mentioned, yet never the less if Mr. Dunster shall please to present any proposiccion to the Towne when mett together, they shalbe willing to further the same according to Justice and Equity."

"At a General meeting of the Inhabitants of the towne the 8<sup>th</sup> of the 10<sup>th</sup> mo - 1656.

The Towne do agree and consent that there shalbe a rate made to the vallue of ~~£~~108. 10<sup>s</sup> and levied of the severall Inhabitants, for the payment of the schoole house provided every man be allowed what he hath already freely contrebuted thereto, in part of his proporcion of such rate."

"At a Publique meeting of the Inhabitants the 12<sup>th</sup> of November 1660.

As a final issue of all complaints referring to Mr. Dunsters Expences about the schoole house, all though in strict justice nothing doth appeare to be due, it being done by a voluntary act of particular Inhabitants, and Mr. Dunster: and also the Towne haveing otherwise recompenced Mr. Dunster for his labor and



expences therein yet the Towne considering the case as it is now circumstanced, and especially the Condiccion of his relict widow and children, do agree that thirty pounds be levied on the Inhabitants of the Towne by the Select men, and that on Condiccion that they make an absolute deed of sale of the said House and land to the Towne, with a clear acquittance for the full payment thereof."

"4 (8) 1669

At a meeting of the selectmen mr. william Manning and petter Towne was appointed to agree with workmen to take downe the scholehouse, and set It up againe; and to Cary the stones in the seller to the place wheare the house for the ministry Is to be built."

"At a Generall meeting of the Inhabitants of Cambridge the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 1700.

It was then Voted that the Schoolhouse Should be forthwith fitted up By Rebuilding the Same. And that the Charge that Should arise thereby Should be added (by the Select Men) to the town Rate granted by the Inhabitants the 18<sup>th</sup> of May 1700."

"Sept. 9<sup>th</sup> 1700. At a Meeting of the Selectmen John Leverett Esqr. and Deacon Hasting were appointed to Treat with Zachary Hicks Junior and Jos. Hicks, or some other Sutable person or persons Concerning the Rebuilding the Schoolhouse which said house is to be 20 foot wide and 26 foot in length, the above mentioned persons are also appointed to take care that the above mentioned House be speedyly done, In good Workman like order."





This house lasted until 1769 when it was ordered to be demolished and a new house be erected on the southern side of Garden street, about one hundred feet west of Appian Way.

It was in the first two school houses erected on the "Daye house" lot that Master Elijah Corlett taught for forty years. His school was a preparatory school for the college and the grammar he taught was the Latin grammar. It was exclusively a boys' school and at one time among his pupils were five Indian youths fitting for the college. For his salary he was dependant upon the parents although occasionally the town gave a little assistance. On the thirteenth of November 1648 it voted "for the gratifying of Mr. Corlet for his paines in keepinge a schoole in the Towne" a gratuity of ten pounds. On the thirteenth of November 1654 it voted to "levy about forty Pounds for the Incouragement of the Grammer Schoole master" but two months later reconsidered and reduced the amount to twenty pounds.

On the twenty-fifth of March 1662 "considering his present necessity by reason of the fewnes of his schollars", the town granted him ten pounds. On the fourteenth of November 1664 the town "voted in the affirmative that Mr. Elijah Corlett shall be allowed and paid out of the town rate annually twenty pounds for so long as he continues to be schoolmaster in this place." On the eighth of November 1669 the town allowed him forty shillings "for the Repayering of his house wheare hee keepe schoole, because the schoole house is to bee taken downe."

Mr. Corlett died in 1688. At that time Rev. Nehemiah Walter was pursuing a post-graduate course at the college, and Mr. Corlett had so much confidence in his abilities that he frequently employed him to take charge of the school when obliged to be absent. On his death, to express his gratitude and honor his memory Walter wrote an Elegy, done in blank verse







































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